

# A Roundtable on Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propoganda, 1945-1959*

David Snyder, Denise J. Youngblood, Simon Miles, Kristy Ironside, Autumn Lass, and  
Rósa Magnúsdóttir

## Introduction to the Roundtable on Rósa Magnúsdóttir's *Enemy Number One*

David Snyder

Like the little dog Toto, Rósa Magnúsdóttir's *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945-1959*, offers readers a peek behind the curtain of Cold War-era Soviet ideological production. Most reviewers in this roundtable concur that Magnúsdóttir offers valuable insight into the making of Soviet ideology during the early Cold War, especially for non-specialists needing an introduction to Soviet ideological machinery in this period. For Kristy Ironside, Magnúsdóttir offers a "nuanced portrayal of Soviet propaganda-making." Autumn Lass judges the book an "excellent addition" to the historiography. Simon Miles asserts that "*Enemy Number One* is a valuable contribution to the historiography of the Cold War." I concur with these judgments, yet like that earlier Technicolor view behind the curtain, there may be cause to question what is revealed.

Magnúsdóttir examines the manufacture and dissemination of Soviet propaganda, and undoubtedly she does map out the larger political and ideological terrain in which Soviet propaganda bureaucracies and agencies worked. She demonstrates that historical developments inside (especially Stalin's death) and outside that bureaucracy impacted the development of Soviet ideology and hence of Soviet propaganda. This is a view of the propaganda factory, if you will, and a sense of the political conditions under which such propaganda was made. So far so good, and much of this material is very useful. Magnúsdóttir observes, for example, that the Soviets always distinguished a more complicated America than the Americans made of the Soviet Union: there were good, working-class Americans, but they were exploited by the greedy American bourgeoisie.

Some of our reviewers observe, however, that Magnúsdóttir's analytical rigor wavers when the examination shifts away from the *making* of propaganda to the equally important *deployment* of that propaganda. It's never exactly clear whether Magnúsdóttir understands the audience for this work to be internal Soviet citizens whose allegiance to the regime required constant propaganda

support, or the external world of Soviet allies and western enemies. Miles, for example, observes how Magnúsdóttir "illustrate[s] how the Soviet authorities presented the United States to the public," but the ambiguity he recapitulates there is telling: which public? the American public? the Soviet public? allied or antagonist publics?

Magnúsdóttir might have addressed the ambiguity by forthrightly confining her examination to the internal histories of propaganda-making agencies, the propaganda factory, if you will. Yet she cannot avoid glimpses at the receiving end, whether tracking internal propaganda initiatives such as the censoring for Soviet political audiences of the magazine *Amerika* or the Voice of America, or examining aspects of Soviet public diplomacy such as the World Youth Festival of 1957; an entire chapter is devoted to "Soviet-American Cultural Encounters in Late Stalinism." But these forays are not sustained, leaving both sides of her audience-level analyses at half-measure: the famed "Peace Offensive" of the early 1950s, for example, locked in mortal ideological conflict with the USA's own "Campaign of Truth," is not mentioned. No analysis of the visit of the Bolshoi ballet, very little of the 1959 Moscow Exhibition, no Van Cliburn, no Kitchen Debate. Soviet authorities censoring of American media within the USSR is hardly an account of Soviet public diplomacy to the Americans, and vice versa.

Thus both accounts of Soviet propaganda at the receiving end are under-developed, especially so with regard to Soviet public diplomacy abroad. The same shifting contingencies that produced ideological change within the propaganda factories are not examined with respect to strategies of public diplomacy, including technological challenges, media analysis, the dialectical engagement with American propaganda in the same period, and broader geopolitical/historical concerns. Ironside agrees when she expresses surprise "not to see any reflection on the fact that the Soviet government faced particular challenges in controlling images of the Soviet Union in the United States because of the more diffuse nature of information distribution channels in a capitalist economy." A bigger book may have been able to interweave these two fronts into a compelling account of Soviet ideology writ large but at a sprightly 159 pages of text, this book is not that one.

Our reviewers raised the same concern about the analysis of the receiving end when it comes to internal

Soviet audiences, Denise Youngblood above all. Because the audience dimension of Magnúsdóttir's communicative axis—all communication requires more than one interlocutor, after all—remains obscured, and hence passive, she does not direct sustained analytical attention to who was reading the magazines or seeing the films or attending the exhibitions produced by the propaganda apparatus. Because of this, as Youngblood contends, "*Enemy Number One* consistently underestimates the degree and extent of the resistance to anti-American propaganda" among the general Soviet population, and certainly within certain intellectual precincts. "In short," Youngblood contends, "propaganda is an exceptionally tricky subject that requires multifaceted analysis, not just of the message itself and the historical context that generated it, but also of the medium that communicated it *and the audience that received it.*" [emphasis added]

In her rejoinder to this roundtable, Magnúsdóttir extends the essential confusion. She writes that her book "is ultimately about the process of cultural production, not the cultural products that the Soviet state turned out." Fair enough. But communication is always an axial proposition, requiring at least two (and in this case, many more) interlocutors to complete the circuit. Magnúsdóttir insists her focus is on the U.S. by which she means the image of the U.S. *within* Soviet ideology and propaganda. Yet she also wants it the other way, insisting that her book looks "behind the scenes of cultural diplomacy," which indicates that she believes she is investigating some aspect of Soviet foreign public diplomacy. Her comparison to Laura Belmonte's *Selling the American Way*, which she incorrectly summarizes as demonstrating how American officials "promoted 'the American way of life' in the United States" illustrates the conceptual confusion in play here. Belmonte's foundational study, of course, examines the production of American propaganda, as does Magnúsdóttir. But Belmonte is clear that the intended audience for such propaganda is a foreign -- admittedly friendly -- audience. Hers is not a study of central state political propaganda directed at its own citizens, as Magnúsdóttir's is sometimes -- though not always.

Magnúsdóttir concludes her rejoinder by observing that her book examines the difficulties of producing propaganda that "navigate[d] the cultural output and control[led] the message at the same time." This, I wish to emphasize, seems exactly spot on, and picking up from Belmonte, points to what I hope is a future thread in all work on Cold War-era (and beyond) cultural diplomacy: how did officials wrestle, at the granular level, with the cultural output that existed and occurred beyond their direct control? This is an especially pressing question in U.S. public diplomacy studies, and one that has yet to find its fullest treatment. We need more sense of *competition*: the competitions between state propaganda agencies and their counterparts in other countries, and also between those agencies and the private realms of cultural production in their respective countries. Ironside concurs here, noting how Magnúsdóttir missed the chance to view Soviet and U.S. propagandists locked in battle with each other over, for example, the Pasternak affair.

If she has not quite produced a careful analysis of how Soviet propaganda was mediated to its respective audiences, of the technologies employed, of the different contingencies it faced, and how it may have been received by very different audiences, Magnúsdóttir nevertheless offers a solid introduction to the study of Soviet ideology, the contingencies it faced, and lays down a solid foundation for further analyses. Miles concludes that "[w]hat emerges from this portrayal is, above all, a clear image of just how insecure the Soviet Union's leadership was about their position in the world -- and particularly, relative to the United States" and on that there is full agreement. Yet it

should not be forgotten that the creation of propaganda is a multi-faceted undertaking with profoundly deep layers of care and consideration taken at the point of manufacture. Propagandists can never control, however, the effects of their creations in the wild, as they contend with prevailing patterns of cultural understanding at home and abroad, competing propaganda agendas, multi-faceted political audiences, and unexpected political challenges. "Propaganda," Denise Youngblood astutely reminds, "can never be taken at face value."

**Review of Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959***

Denise J. Youngblood

*Enemy Number One* is the first scholarly study to attempt a systematic examination of the ideological underpinnings of Soviet cultural policies vis-à-vis the United States during the Cold War. Condensing research from Russian archives (mainly the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, but also the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art) and targeted reading of the secondary literature into a scant 159 pages of text, *Enemy Number One* shows some of the ways the Soviet state attempted to convince its citizens that the United States was no longer a friend and ally of the USSR, but rather its bitterest enemy.

Rósa Magnúsdóttir hews closely to her thesis. Where other scholars might revel in the paradoxes inherent in this subject and probe into their complexities, she stays on point—and therein is the central problem of her book. This is a subject that cries out for a more expansive, less hierarchical approach, one that is not so rigorously bounded by its very limited time period and intense focus on the official message. *Enemy Number One* marks a return to "history from above," an approach long absent from Soviet history.

The book is divided into two parts. The first covers the early postwar era, to Stalin's death; the second deals with the first years of Khrushchev's erratic reign and ends abruptly in 1959, on the eve of Khrushchev's first visit to the United States. It is not surprising that part 1 is the more successful of the two, given that the ideological line on the United States was most rigorously maintained in the late 1940s. Magnúsdóttir argues that Stalin planned for the possibility of a reversal in U.S. relations as World War II was ending, even before Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in 1946, and she provides compelling evidence that supports what most scholars have long assumed. As a description of the "new" anti-Americanism and how it evolved in the late 1940s, her book offers interesting information on how Soviet ideologues operated. However, when the focus shifts to the *application* of these ideas in the cultural arena, the book is less convincing, because the author sidesteps what for me is the central question of her research: what evidence do we have that Soviet citizens actually believed any of this?

Magnúsdóttir is quite right to point out that a renewed emphasis on anti-American propaganda played a role in various postwar propaganda campaigns intended to combat "Western" and "bourgeois" influences in Soviet culture, of which Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov's concerted attack on "formalism" in Soviet literature (1946–48, dubbed the *zhdanovshchina*), and the anti-Semitic "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign (1949) are the best known. Because of the high degree of negative propaganda intrinsic to these campaigns, it is all too easy to minimize the importance of their positive components. Yes, they were directed *against* foreigners and foreign influences in culture, but they

were also for an “authentic” Russian culture that proudly asserted its dominance in the arts and sciences. Stalin had long understood how to exploit the arts, especially cinema, to disseminate the state’s messages, and a spate of “biopics” exaggerating Russian achievements were released, like Gerbert Rappoport’s 1949 film *Alexander Popov*, which gives the lion’s share of credit for the invention of the radio to Popov, rather than to Marconi. Bloviated Great Russian nationalism, introduced in the mid-1930s, reached its heights at this time as a counterweight to perceived U.S. dominance.

Magnúsdóttir avoids messy complications by limiting her discussion of this period to negative propaganda—in particular, the specifically anti-American Cold War films of the late Stalin period. There were only four major anti-American films, the most popular being Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *The Meeting on the Elbe* (*Vstrecha na Elbe*), which led the box office in 1949. Although the historic meeting of Allied troops at the Elbe River appears at several junctures in the book, Magnúsdóttir instead chooses Mikhail Romm’s *The Russian Question* (*Russkii vopros*, 1948) to illustrate her point.

*The Russian Question* is an undeniably “anti-American” exposé of the falsity of American claims to a free press, adapted from a play by well-known writer Konstantin Simonov. An honest American journalist who wants to tell the “truth” about the Soviet Union finds his career destroyed by the fat-cat capitalists who control the paper, and his materialistic wife leaves him when he can no longer afford to maintain their lavish home. The problem is that readers who haven’t seen the film wouldn’t realize that its emphasis is as much on the “good American” hero, who is very sympathetic, as it is on the “bad American” villains, who are not intrinsically evil, just corrupted by capitalism.

As Tony Shaw and I demonstrated in our book *Cinematic Cold War* (which Magnúsdóttir cites for factual information only), “good Americans” were essential characters in early Soviet Cold War films.<sup>1</sup> Documents we consulted in Gosfilmofond, the state film archive, clearly reveal how the “artistic councils” in the Ministry of Cinematography operated at this time. Film bureaucrats were invariably sharply critical when they judged the depiction of Americans to be too one-dimensional or unsympathetic. These ideological watchdogs were not at all concerned about “bourgeois” principles of fairness, but they were very concerned that Soviet moviegoers should find the American characters believable. They recognized that relentlessly negative attacks on Americans were unlikely to convince audiences, because sympathy for American culture ran deep in Soviet educated society even before the wartime alliance, despite sporadic attempts to suppress it.

In my view, which is based on decades of research in Soviet cultural history (with a specific focus on American influences), *Enemy Number One* consistently underestimates the degree and extent of the resistance to anti-American propaganda, privileging anti-American observations from officials (who wanted to keep their jobs) and writers (like Ilia Erenburg) widely judged to have sold their souls to the regime long before. In fact, fascination with American culture, dubbed “Americanitis” (*amerikanshchina*), persisted from the 1920s to the end of the regime.

Magnúsdóttir does acknowledge the influence of American culture in the 1920s, briefly citing work by Alan Ball (*Imagining America*) and the late Richard Stites (*Russian Popular Culture*), but more extensive reading in the rich trove of material on New Economic Policy culture might have persuaded her that that “Americanitis” was deeply rooted.<sup>2</sup> To name only a few examples, my book *Movies for the Masses* devotes a chapter to this phenomenon; and

pro-Americanism is central to S. Frederick Starr’s classic study of Soviet jazz *Red and Hot* and especially to Marina L. Levitina’s *Russian Americans” in Soviet Film*, which traces the phenomenon well into the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Magnúsdóttir relies on Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh’s biased and ill-informed *Soviet Cinematography, 1918–1991*.<sup>4</sup> Even Ilia Ilf and Evgenii Petrov’s funny, tongue-in-cheek account of their road trip across the United States in the mid-1930s (*Single-Story America* [*Odnoetazhnaia Amerika*]) is marshaled as evidence of “disappointment” with America.<sup>5</sup>

Because so many Soviet citizens were already fascinated by American culture, it wasn’t hard for them to accept the United States as an ally in World War II. It was, on the other hand, hard for them to reverse course—hence the care with which the state handled anti-American film propaganda after the war. Making it even harder was the ubiquity of the popular “trophy films” captured from the Germans, many of them American films from the 1930s. Magnúsdóttir does mention this, pointing to the popularity of Johnny Weissmuller’s *Tarzan* films, but she seems unfamiliar with the research underscoring the importance of the trophy films to the cultural Cold War. Articles like

Magnúsdóttir avoids messy complications by limiting her discussion of this period to negative propaganda—in particular, the specifically anti-American Cold War films of the late Stalin period.

Sergei Kapterev’s “Illusionary Spoils” and Claire Knight’s “Stalin’s Trophy Films, 1947–52” and “Enemy Films on Soviet Screens” make it clear that the trophy films were much more than a footnote to the repertory.<sup>6</sup>

By the time of Stalin’s death, therefore, the preconditions for Khrushchev’s cultural thaw and his tentative efforts to moderate official anti-Americanism had been laid out. This is the subject of the second half of *Enemy Number One*. This half is less tightly focused than the first, which is not surprising, given that everyone at the top was trying to figure out how to operate without Stalin, how to survive the increasingly dangerous competition with the United States, and how to manage the client states in Eastern Europe. Khrushchev’s personal volatility and inability to hew a steady course did not help.

After Stalin’s death, a great deal of effort was expended on person-to-person contacts with Americans (and other Westerners), which rarely yielded the desired results, at least not until the first cultural exchange agreement was signed in 1958. The Soviet government hoped to generate favorable publicity in the United States by inviting well-known Americans—novelist John Steinbeck was one—who weren’t necessarily Soviet sympathizers but at the same time weren’t too hostile to the USSR to tour the country (carefully shepherded, of course). But only ten years after the war, despite massive rebuilding (without Marshall Plan funds), the Soviet Union was still too drab to impress Americans, and even after McCarthyism ended, few Americans dared to admire the Soviet Union too much.

Magnúsdóttir also describes the trips that Soviet bureaucrats and a few Soviet artists made to the United States in the 1950s. It was hoped that these “cultural diplomats” could establish friendly networks among Americans, but those who were deemed politically reliable enough to be allowed to travel to the United States were generally too rigid and dull to make a positive impression on Americans (a fact I can confirm from my own contacts with official Soviet visitors in the 1970s and 1980s). Finally, the author devotes considerable effort to describing the impact of the International Youth Festival held in Moscow in 1957, which attracted some 30,000 attendees. Although the festival did indeed mark a point of no return in opening Soviet culture to foreign influences, it has already received significant scholarly attention, and there is nothing particularly new in this account.

I was really surprised to see Van Cliburn receive only four words in part 2, with no mention of his sensational

victory at the First International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in 1958. Cliburn cannot be considered as merely one of the many American artists who performed in the USSR in the 1950s, certainly not in a book about Soviet attitudes toward Americans. The Tchaikovsky Competition dominated Moscow's public life for nearly two months. This was the moment when all pretense of official anti-Americanism collapsed: the young Texan was enthusiastically embraced by Muscovites—and music lovers throughout the USSR—as “our Van, our Cliburn.” Khrushchev inadvertently scored a major victory in the cultural Cold War by simply bowing to the will not only of head judge Emil Gilels, but also of the ordinary citizens who crowded the auditorium whenever Cliburn was playing. The U.S. State Department was caught flatfooted, so sure were they that the contest was rigged.

The Cliburn story is a terrific tale that could have been the centerpiece of the second half of *Enemy Number One*. It is also the subject of an excellent book, Stuart Isacoff's *When the World Stopped to Listen*, which is not cited (although a lesser book on the subject is), perhaps because this manuscript had already been delivered to the publisher.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the event deserves in-depth treatment here, especially since it might have led the author to a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between anti-American propaganda and alleged Soviet anti-American sentiments.

I began reading *Enemy Number One* willing to be convinced that it is time to re-inject a dose of politics into Soviet cultural history. Obviously, I remain a skeptic. My skepticism is informed not only by my forty-five years of studying Soviet popular culture and Soviet-American cultural relations, but also by my lived experience as a participant-observer in the Cold War, which was the backdrop for more than half my life. I grew up in a small town near Louisville, Kentucky (and the gold reserves at Fort Knox), and I have vivid memories of American anti-Soviet propaganda (think *Atomic Café*). At least once a week in elementary school, we watched sinister anti-Soviet films, many of them dark tales of Soviet children reporting on their parents to the secret police. My own parents were vigorously anti-communist; I spent the Cuban Missile Crisis in our family's bomb shelter, a concrete bunker fully stocked with weapons as well as food and water.

If Magnúsdóttir is right about the impact of negative propaganda during the Cold War, I should have become a fire-breathing Cold Warrior. Instead, I got in trouble at school for challenging the silly films and scaring the other children by mocking the “duck and cover” drills. And of course, I eventually became a Soviet historian. When I traveled to the USSR for the first time in 1978–79 as a doctoral student participating in the official exchange program administered in the U.S. by the International Research & Exchanges Board and in the USSR by the Ministry of Higher Education, I wasn't surprised to find a similar skepticism about the propaganda war coming from virtually every Soviet citizen I met, including the dean of foreign students at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, who was almost certainly a KGB officer. Nor was I surprised that my Soviet friends were completely uninterested in reading the copies of *Amerika* that I brought them from the U.S. embassy or listening to the VOA or RFE/RL (instead of the BBC). As they said, smiling, “We have our own propaganda; we don't need yours.”

My purpose in recounting these personal anecdotes is to emphasize that propaganda can never be taken at face value. Magnúsdóttir mentions early on that we have no way of knowing for certain how anti-American propaganda affected Soviet citizens. That is true, but informed conjectures are certainly possible. For example, with films, we can understand something (although certainly not everything) about audience preferences by looking at

attendance figures. Trophy films almost always outsold domestic films (not because people were particularly “pro-American,” but because the films were novel and exotic). Spy films outsold biopics (not because audiences were “anti-American,” but because the films were fast-paced and entertaining and usually offered a glimpse of Western lifestyles). Soviet audiences *never* attended heavy-handed propaganda films willingly; the authorities were so attuned to this fact of Soviet life that they would occasionally fix attendance figures for certain films by *forcing* attendance through the workers' clubs. In short, propaganda is an exceptionally complex subject that requires multifaceted analysis, not just of the message itself and the ideological and political contexts that generated it, but also of the cultural and social contexts, especially the media that communicated it and the audiences that received it.

#### Notes:

1. Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence, KS, 2010).
2. Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Lanham, MD, 2003); Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge, UK, 1992).
3. Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, UK, 1992); S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980* (Oxford, UK, 1983); and Marina L. Levitina, “Russian Americans” in *Soviet Film: Cinematic Dialogues between the US and the USSR* (London, 2015).
4. Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography, 1918–1991: Ideological Conflict and Social Reality* (New York, 1993).
5. For a recent (retitled) translation see Ilia Ilf and Evgenii Petrov, *Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip: The 1935 Travelogue of Two Soviet Writers*, ed. Erika Wolf, trans. Anne O. Fisher (New York, 2007).
6. Sergei Kapterev, “Illusionary Spoils: Soviet Attitudes toward American Cinema during the Early Cold War,” *Kritika* 10:4 (2009); Claire Knight, “Stalin's Trophy Films, 1947–52,” *KinoKultura* 48 (2015) and “Enemy Films on Soviet Screens,” *Kritika* 18:1 (2017).
7. Stuart Isacoff, *When the World Stopped to Listen: Van Cliburn's Cold War Triumph, and Its Aftermath* (New York, 2017).

### Review of Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959*

Simon Miles

In the spring of 1945, Red Army soldiers advancing westward and their U.S. counterparts headed east met on the banks of the Elbe River on the outskirts of Berlin. It was, by all accounts, a joyous occasion. The soldiers embraced, just as their leaders had at great-power summits, in recognition of their shared effort in defeating Nazi Germany. But this flush of good feeling was not to last. Within a few short years, Soviet propagandists, under orders from their superiors in the Kremlin and above all from Joseph Stalin, recast the United States from wartime friend and ally to the sworn enemy of the Soviet Union and its people.

Rósa Magnúsdóttir's *Enemy Number One* traces the shifts in U.S.-Soviet relations during the early Cold War through the lens of propaganda. The Cold War story she tells is above all a cultural one, where who had the upper hand was much more dependent on soft-power considerations like magazines and press tours than hard-power considerations like missile throw weights and tank divisions lined up opposite one another in the Fulda Gap. Her protagonists are “ideological workers” and their political overlords, who used propaganda to rally the Soviet people around the Kremlin leadership and against a common enemy in the United States (3). Covering the period from 1945 to 1959,

Magnúsdóttir chronicles how Soviet propagandists cast the United States—and how they fought off challengers to that dominant narrative—during the late Stalinist period of hostility and the beginning of Nikita Khrushchev's tenure, when new cultural contacts emerged from his policy of "peaceful coexistence" and, most famously, his trip to the United States in September 1959.

Magnúsdóttir draws on a wide range of archival sources from Soviet repositories in order to tell the story of how Soviet officialdom depicted the United States. Government documents pertaining to culture from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union work alongside, for example, the records of the Soviet Writers' Union to illustrate how the Soviet authorities presented the United States to the public. Importantly, she also brings to bear sources that illuminate, at least in broad strokes, how the Soviet public viewed the United States. This is a challenge and bound to sacrifice granularity for broad generalization, but Magnúsdóttir's use, in particular, of the judicial files of people convicted of being too pro-American and then rehabilitated and the letters of Soviet citizens to Khrushchev before his trip to the United States offers valuable insight into perceptions in the Soviet Union.

What emerges from this portrayal is, above all, a clear image of just how insecure the Soviet Union's leadership was about their country's position relative to the world and particularly to the United States. The Cold War was, after all, not just a competition between two states, even extraordinarily powerful ones; it was a contest between two fundamentally incompatible definitions of modernity and legitimacy, two systems of organizing states and the international order. While the Soviet leadership was unlikely to have accepted George Kennan's conclusion that "Soviet society may well contain deficiencies which will eventually weaken its own total potential," those in the Kremlin certainly were not interested in stress-testing it.<sup>1</sup> Rather, they focused on shielding the Soviet public from the United States and, when that proved impossible, ensuring that they reached the "correct conclusions" about the other superpower, and about the one in which they lived (122). That insecurity, particularly vis-à-vis the United States, was an issue whose seriousness U.S. policymakers at the time clearly did not fully appreciate, and it is an important thread running through the book.

Magnúsdóttir shows that having an enemy suited the Kremlin's leadership and remained a constant in Soviet propaganda during the Cold War. In the past, these stark contrasts between, for example, Reds and Whites in the Civil War, peasants and kulaks in the collectivization campaigns, and, above all, Soviets and Nazis during World War II, had been valuable sources of both cohesion and motivation. *Enemy Number One* shows how, despite the waxing and waning of the Cold War itself, the U.S. enemy was a useful tool for the Soviet leadership, and one they deftly and comfortably employed. For example, the warmth of Khrushchev's tour of the United States gave way to a renewed focus on U.S. aggression following the downing of Francis Gary Powers's U-2 spy plane in Soviet airspace. The Kremlin could portray even the storied meeting on the Elbe as too little, too late from the United States, as the Soviet Union had already done the heavy lifting in winning World War II by beating back Hitler's armies.

At the beginning of the Cold War, however, not all in the United States were the enemy. Rather, like good Marxists, Soviet propagandists saw a class struggle playing out within the rival superpower. There were, they maintained,

two Americas: a progressive "second America" friendly to the Soviet Union made up of some communists and fellow-travelers, to be sure, but also a great many ordinary citizens, whom the Wall Street or Washington warmongers suppressed and led into conflict with Moscow (17). This dichotomy mapped particularly well onto the very real racism faced by African Americans in the United States.

In the past, the Soviet Union had been open even to the ideas of the arch-capitalists Henry Ford and Fredrick Winslow Taylor, but by the 1940s there was little room in the Soviet discourse for these one-time icons. The Soviet Union's propagandists had their work cut out for them in the immediate aftermath of World War II, however;

depicting the United States as a crumbling capitalist relic was hard to do when all around them, American-made cars drove on the streets and workers toiled in factories filled with American machinery. Try as they might to suppress the fact of a wartime U.S.-Soviet alliance and silence the memory thereof, these constant material reminders were a major obstacle.

The Kremlin's solution was censorship. The U.S.-sponsored journal *Amerika* may have been guaranteed circulation in a 1944 treaty between Washington and Moscow, but the authorities made sure it was

hard to come by and persecuted those found to have been reading this ostensibly legal source of information. The Voice of America, the U.S.-backed news and culture radio network, was eventually jammed in cities. At this early stage of the Cold War, even interest in the United States was unacceptable to the government. But that interest, as much to do with curiosity about the wider world as dissatisfaction with Soviet socialism, proved impossible to extinguish. Curious Soviet citizens did not always like what they saw, be it the racism African Americans faced in their daily lives or the witch-hunts of Joseph McCarthy, but during the early Cold War, U.S. propaganda seemed to be winning.

Cultural contacts, except for those minutely stage-managed by the Kremlin, were forbidden. And even those did not always rebound to the Soviet Union's benefit. When John Steinbeck visited the Soviet Union in 1947, the Kremlin believed he could be persuaded of the merits of the communist system, even if he had dismissed the American Communist Party as "stupid" (69). But the account he produced of his journey from Potemkin town to Potemkin factory throughout the Soviet Union did not resonate with audiences in the United States, especially those members of émigré communities who knew the dark reality behind Moscow's façade.

The death of Stalin and Khrushchev's rise to power play a pivotal role in Magnúsdóttir's narrative. With a new general secretary came a new approach to the United States in the strategy of peaceful coexistence—which included a reevaluation of propaganda tactics. In the aftermath of the Geneva summit between Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States in July 1955, space opened up for contacts between a select few in sectors ranging from literature to agriculture—a particular interest of Khrushchev's. Fittingly, some of the first U.S.-Soviet encounters were on the Elbe, where groups of veterans from both sides commemorated the ten-year anniversary of the meeting that signified the end of World War II. Participants looked back on 1945 with fondness and wondered why now, a decade later, the two superpowers were so hostile.

Opening itself up to the West opened the Soviet Union up to new criticisms, however, beginning with the low

What emerges from this portrayal is, above all, a clear image of just how insecure the Soviet Union's leadership was about their country's position relative to the world and particularly to the United States. The Cold War was, after all, not just a competition between two states, even extraordinarily powerful ones; it was a contest between two fundamentally incompatible definitions of modernity and legitimacy, two systems of organizing states and the international order.

standards of hospitality on its flag carrier, Aeroflot. "If the gateway is bad," American farmer John Jacobs warned his Soviet hosts after one journey, "nothing good can be expected to follow" (92). But more serious than airline deficiencies were the fears Soviet policymakers held onto about their own citizens' commitment to the cause of socialism. They feared what would happen if Soviet tourists traveled to the United States and liked what they saw, that is to say, if they failed to view the country's accomplishments through the appropriate socialist lens.

Peaceful coexistence offered a means for the Soviet Union to go on the ideological offensive by showing off its successes to the world through fairs, exhibitions, and other large-scale events with an international profile. This did not mean an end to persecution: even after Khrushchev's famed February 25, 1956, secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the courts continued to dispense convictions for anti-Soviet activity, an important nuance Magnúsdóttir adds to the prevailing image of liberal reform and a thaw in the country after 1956. But during the 1950s, it was the American way of life (or rather, an idealized and more marketable version thereof) that took hold in the imaginations of people the world over, not the Soviet one. While that development gave the Kremlin a new slogan—Khrushchev now implored his fellow Soviets to "catch up with and surpass America"—the Soviet authorities were loath to relax their grip on ideology enough to allow their citizens to experience the United States.<sup>2</sup> The exception to this policy, of course, was Khrushchev himself, whose rollicking tour of the country inaugurated a new era in U.S.-Soviet contacts, managed though they remained.

Magnúsdóttir's is not a Soviet propaganda success story. The Kremlin failed utterly to convey a compelling story about the successes and potential of Soviet socialism to audiences in the United States (and beyond). Part of the problem was one of style. Images of massive military parades full of tanks lumbering across Red Square conjured up visions of Armageddon in the minds of most Americans, not of a utopian socialist future. Viewers in the United States friendly to the Soviet Union warned Moscow of its shortcomings, advising that snapshots of everyday Soviet life, particularly home life and leisure time, would have more traction with audiences in the West. "Showing," for an American audience, "works better than telling," they advised, but none of the proposed changes were ever made (79).<sup>3</sup>

The problem was also one of substance. Soviet propaganda grew increasingly out of touch with the realities of life in the United States, as those who crafted it enjoyed only limited access to sources on the United States on which to base their work. After 1955, that access expanded, but they never succeeded in turning their factually correct analysis of the problems in racial and economic inequality in the United States into effective propaganda tools. The Soviet Union is now thought of as the quintessential propaganda state, but Magnúsdóttir shows that, in many senses, it was an abject failure.

*Enemy Number One* is a valuable contribution to the historiography of the Cold War. It illuminates the two sides to propaganda which played out in the Soviet Union: the offensive, designed to persuade others of the merits of Soviet socialism, and the defensive, designed to control information about the United States at home. Magnúsdóttir paints a vivid picture of a different side to the Cold War than many study, but one which she demonstrates to have been just as critical to its prosecution. Hopefully, in the future, she will carry this important work forward past 1959 into the later Cold War.

Notes:

1. 'X' (George F. Kennan), "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (1947): 581.
2. Nikita Khrushchev remarks, Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, "Uspeshno pretvorim v zhizn' resheniia ianvar'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS," January 28, 1961, in *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva* (Moscow, 1963), 396.
3. Indeed, it was just that sort of imagery and approach that the United States used to great effect in its own propaganda aimed at the Soviet Union.

### **Review of Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959***

Kristy Ironside

Rósa Magnúsdóttir's *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959* begins and ends with an evocative image: Soviet and American troops, allies during the Second World War, toasting to their everlasting friendship on the banks of the river Elbe during the waning days of the conflict. That event was commemorated in America during the brief "reset" in Russian-American relations in 2010. For most of the intervening years, it would be extremely difficult for Soviet and American veterans to maintain contact with one another, let alone friendships. With the onset of the Cold War, the Soviet Union as a whole would be exposed to an aggressive anti-American campaign that "reached all areas of political and cultural life and dramatically limited possibilities for contacts with the former allies" (1).

Under the banner of this campaign, the Soviet government attempted to "control, contain, and appropriate images of the United States" (2). The challenges and difficulties involved in this project are the subject of Magnúsdóttir's study (3). The book is divided into two parts, encompassing the late Stalin era and first half of the Khrushchev years and the shift from a more hostile confrontation under the former to a more hesitant interaction under the latter. The battle for hearts and minds between the two Cold War foes is familiar terrain for scholars of American cultural diplomacy, and Magnúsdóttir admittedly covers a lot of the same ground; however, she comes at it from the perspective of a Soviet historian, providing "a much-needed account of the inner workings of Soviet ideology and propaganda and its effects as it related to its number one enemy" (12).<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 1 looks at how the Soviet party-state designed and implemented its anti-American campaign in the early years of the Cold War. As Magnúsdóttir emphasizes, members of the Soviet creative intelligentsia and the Communist Party played a key role here (18). Anti-Americanism was nothing new in Soviet culture, and some anti-American works from the interwar period were even revived at this time, such as Maxim Gorky's account of his visit to America in 1906 (29–32). What was new was the extent to which the party managed authors' and artists' anti-American cultural production (25). Indeed, this occurred against the backdrop of the "*Zhdanovshchina*," or period of anti-cosmopolitan cultural isolationism (named after one of Stalin's leading ideologists), in which patriotism was the order of the day. Magnúsdóttir points out that this Soviet patriotism "could not coexist with any form of sympathy for the West, especially not for the United States" (19).

That said, not all Americans were demonized, or certainly not equally. If in the United States the Soviet Union tended to be conflated with "the Russians" as a monolithic group, Americans were divided into two groups in Soviet propaganda: "evil" Americans were depicted as greedy capitalists who oppressed their socially progressive

compatriots, while “good” Americans were usually those who were favorably disposed toward the Soviet Union, but also normal people who were misled and manipulated by the “bad” Americans (17). These themes were present, often in a crude and exaggerated way, in books, plays, and movies produced by the Soviet intelligentsia, but also in the work of so-called progressive American writers whose work was deemed fit for Soviet consumption (34). Well-known and critically acclaimed writers like Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck were published and widely read. However, as Magnúsdóttir emphasizes, not all could be considered prominent or high-quality writers and “most of the American authors whose works were printed in the Soviet Union were accepted only because they criticized American culture and politics in a way that was satisfactory to the Soviet authorities”—in other words, because they dealt with American social, economic, and racial issues in a strongly critical way (35–36).

The second chapter deals with American propaganda directed at Soviet audiences, focusing on the Voice of America (VOA) and the glossy magazine *Amerika*, and Soviet authorities’ reactions to these vehicles for American influence. The Soviet government jammed the former and impeded the circulation of the latter. These efforts demonstrate, Magnúsdóttir argues, “how far Soviet authorities were willing to go in order to keep their ideological domination and control interest in the American enemy” (39). That included repressing and arresting individuals who listened to VOA broadcasts or were found with copies of *Amerika* in their possession.

The remainder of this chapter deals with ordinary Soviet citizens’ reception of American propaganda. Magnúsdóttir points out that the Soviet government carefully monitored interest in America through reports on the popular mood (*svodki*) and notes that “no other foreign country receives as much mention in the *svodki* of the postwar years” (48). These *svodki* demonstrated “a fear of the supposed impact of rumors and alternative sources of information in the Soviet Union” (47). A second source that Magnúsdóttir uses for evaluating Soviet reception of American propaganda is the rehabilitation case files for individuals convicted of anti-Soviet activities in this period (49–50). The repressed individuals in her sample often compared the Soviet Union unfavorably to America, whether that was in terms of its military strength, the availability of consumer goods, or political freedoms, often on the basis of information they had gleaned from VOA broadcasts (50–56).

Chapter 3 looks at Soviet efforts to “tell the truth” about Soviet socialism abroad through the efforts of quasi-independent—but in reality state-directed—cultural organizations like the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) and intermediaries like journalists. The period also saw some foreign fellow travelers and other American guests visit the Soviet Union. They sought to impress these visitors—John Steinbeck was one—with carefully staged experiences of life in the Soviet Union.

But opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange deteriorated rapidly in the 1950s with the onset of McCarthyism in America (59). Against this backdrop, this chapter charts a growing recognition among Soviet cultural officials that their traditional methods for promoting a positive image of the Soviet Union abroad, namely through front organizations, no longer worked in this hostile environment. Soviet delegations received a frosty reception in the United States before effectively being kicked out. Even

much-anticipated propaganda events like Steinbeck’s visit did not help to promote a positive view of the Soviet Union in America. Because Steinbeck did not produce a glowing account of Soviet life, authorities ultimately concluded that his visit “had done more harm than good” (73).

Chapter 4 looks at the revival of Soviet-American cultural relations, the relaxation of Soviet attitudes toward foreign culture, and the start of the policy of peaceful coexistence under Khrushchev. Patriotic and anti-American themes persisted, but they were less pronounced during this period (82). Trips by official Soviet delegations resumed, and participants reported friendlier encounters, sentiments that were conveyed in their published writings about their travels. It became possible, for the first time since the interwar period, to express positive sentiments about America and its technological advances. At the urging of on-the-ground intermediaries, Soviet propaganda in this period shifted its focus to ordinary people and the joys of Soviet life and began to involve more interpersonal methods (80). At the same time, many Soviet cultural intermediaries continued to express anxiety that Soviet propaganda techniques were outdated and, in many cases, they were not “telling the truth” but simply “preaching to the converted”—that is, to fellow travelers and not to ordinary Americans (93).

The fifth chapter looks at Soviet-American cultural relations after the pivotal moment of the Twentieth Party Congress and Khrushchev’s secret speech condemning Stalin. During this time, the creative intelligentsia became less fearful in its dealings with central authorities in comparison to the Stalin years, but the government still exerted tight control over information about America, allowing the magazine *Amerika* to circulate once again, but still jamming VOA broadcasts. Khrushchev sought to show off

Soviet accomplishments to America, notably through the 1957 World Festival of Youth and Students—though, as Magnúsdóttir notes in passing, the United States did not acknowledge the festival as a venue for the competition between them (112). Although she does not mention it here, the festival was organized by a leftwing youth association and it was primarily leftist youth who attended. Although her account of the festival provides broader context on Khrushchev-era fears about youth becoming infatuated with foreign cultures during a period in which, as she rightfully points out, repression was not abandoned, it fits somewhat awkwardly into the topic of the confrontation between communism and capitalism and Soviet-American cultural relations as a result.

The sixth and last chapter looks at the years 1958–1959, in the immediate wake of the signing of the Soviet-American cultural agreement, a period in which cultural exchange and in-person visits were increasingly promoted but Soviet citizens were still expected to draw the “correct” conclusions about America. Soviet authorities had high hopes that the official cultural exchange agreement would provide better information and allow it to fight America better on its home turf. However, this proved not to be the case. If American audiences remained largely uninterested in Soviet messages, Soviet citizens, in Magnúsdóttir’s portrayal, grew dangerously interested in America. The year 1959 proved a turning point, for it was then that both countries held national exhibits and Khrushchev visited America. Magnúsdóttir portrays the American National Exhibit (ANE) as causing great anxiety for the Soviet government with its depiction of lavish consumerism, pointing out that many Soviet citizens were caught stealing

items from its displays (135).

Finally, chapter 6 looks at Khrushchev's September 1959 visit to America and the relatively open public discussion it prompted about the state of Soviet-American relations. Many Soviets wrote Khrushchev to wish him a successful trip, often expressing their desires for peace and their belief that, if the American people could just see what life was really like in the Soviet Union, they would stop fearing them. That belief shows how deeply Soviet propaganda messages about America had penetrated citizens' thinking about the enemy, according to Magnúsdóttir (149–50).

The strengths of *Enemy Number One* lie in its reconstruction of the Soviet institutional apparatus that designed and implemented the Soviet anti-American campaign. Magnúsdóttir offers a nuanced portrayal of this propaganda-making, focusing on middle-level authorities and intermediaries who, unlike their superiors in Moscow, were intimately aware of how ineffective their approach was with American audiences. She portrays the primary obstacle to their efforts as American indifference to their message. This seems highly plausible, however, I was surprised not to see any reflection on the fact that the Soviet government faced particular challenges in controlling images of the Soviet Union in the United States because of the more diffuse nature of information distribution channels in a capitalist economy. Since the media and the book-publishing industry, and cultural production more broadly, were under direct state control in the Soviet Union, it could dictate the content and distribution of ideas in a way that was politically unthinkable and practically difficult in America. Many of the fellow travelers Magnúsdóttir discusses were effectively useless as propaganda vehicles for the Soviet Union not only because they were second-rate writers who did not enjoy large audiences in America, but also because their works were either blacklisted or rejected by mainstream commercial publishers, a fact that is, problematically, never mentioned here.

The book also reaches fairly unnuanced conclusions about Soviet citizens' reception of the image of America that Soviet authorities constructed and promoted, as well as the image that American propaganda directed at them. Despite the regime's efforts to counter American propaganda, limit American influence, and repress those who spoke positively about America, "no amount of Soviet propaganda could cover up the fact that the Soviet Union could not match American images of plenty," Magnúsdóttir concludes (152).<sup>2</sup> This failing is shown most explicitly in the section dealing with the American National Exhibition (ANE), an event that Magnúsdóttir argues "confirmed to both the Soviet leadership and people that the United States provided comforts and goods that the Soviet people could only dream of" (136–37).

This view of the ANE, it should be noted, is at odds with Susan E. Reid's detailed analysis of visitors' responses, which is not cited here, and which shows they had a much more ambivalent reaction. According to Reid, the most common response Soviet citizens expressed in their written comments in guestbooks provided at the event was "disappointment."<sup>3</sup> Soviet citizens were also highly skilled at reading around propaganda content. As Eleonory Gilburd has shown, the Western books that Soviet citizens were increasingly exposed to during Khrushchev's thaw, which were chosen for translation in large part because of their ideologically useful narratives about America, were often transformed by Soviet readers into "books about us."<sup>4</sup> Citizens appreciated American authors like Ernest

Hemingway and J. D. Salinger for the "sincerity" that they found lacking in Soviet literature.<sup>5</sup> Magnúsdóttir's book is thus less revealing in its examination of popular opinion about America than it is in its examination of Soviet authorities' anxieties about the effect of American propaganda upon popular opinion.

*Enemy Number One* is primarily a story about Soviet-American cultural relations through Soviet eyes, but a more balanced approach would have been welcome at certain points. For example, when discussing Soviet publishing practices, Magnúsdóttir cites Melville J. Ruggles, the vice president of the Council of Library Resources in the United States, who, when he visited the Soviet Union in 1961, criticized it for "scrap[ing] the bottom of the barrel... The American literature [the Soviet citizen] is given opportunity to read conveys to him little notion of how we think, of how we live, of our true virtues or of our true faults" (35). Ruggles's criticism is a mirror image of the Soviet government's criticism of America, which it accused of publishing and promoting only negative "anti-Soviet" accounts that did not "tell the truth" about life in the Soviet Union.

The furor that could arise over the promotion of "anti-Soviet" material is perhaps best exemplified by the controversy surrounding *Doctor Zhivago*, which Boris Pasternak published abroad after struggling to do so at home. It topped the *New York Times* bestseller chart in 1958, but at home it was savagely criticized for its purported anti-Soviet content and ultimately banned. The "Pasternak affair," in which the CIA aggressively promoted *Doctor Zhivago* after it sensed the story's great value as a weapon in the ideological battle with the Soviet Union, is curiously absent from Magnúsdóttir's book, though it would have helped to round out the picture of how both sides deployed the strategy of mobilizing domestic critics against the other.<sup>6</sup>

The book ends in 1959 with Khrushchev's visit to America, which, according to Magnúsdóttir, was the high point of the policy of peaceful co-existence. This choice works well to maintain the core binary of the text, which counters Stalin's aggressive anti-Americanism and cultural isolationism with Khrushchev's softer policies of interpersonal contact and expanding cultural relations. But one is left with the nagging feeling that a lot more needed to be said about what came next, which is dealt with only fleetingly in the epilogue. In that final section of the book, the author mentions the Soviet downing of the American U-2 spy plane in 1960 and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, both of which occurred under Khrushchev's tenure, saying that, although these events strained Soviet-American relations, "some of the beneficial results of 1959 could not be reversed," particularly in the arena of international law and in the 1960s generation, which "did not know America but believed in her" (154).

Other questions need further attention. How did coming to the brink of nuclear warfare influence the Soviets' construction of the American enemy, for example? And although it occurs slightly after Khrushchev's tenure and could be considered well beyond the scope of the book, America's entry into the Vietnam war is not mentioned here, though it would make its way onto countless Soviet propaganda posters. In general, American imperialism—and the role it played in Soviet constructions of "enemy number one"—is given short shrift, aside from a discussion of the way it stirred up fears about the outbreak of another war.

This succinct book nevertheless succeeds in charting

the most significant moments in early Cold War cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, and, as such, it will be of great value in the classroom when teaching the Cold War and cultural diplomacy. It explains the genesis of some of the most enduring images that each nation produced of its adversary during the formative years of their confrontation.

Notes:

1. See Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York, 1997). Yale Richmond, a former foreign service officer, wrote another classic of the genre: *Cultural Exchange & The Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA, 2003).
2. This is essentially the same argument made by Walter Hixson. See Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 212–13, 231.
3. Susan E. Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 877.
4. Eleonory Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 103.
5. *Ibid.*, 104.
6. On the American government’s involvement in promoting *Doctor Zhivago*, see Peter Finn and Petra Couvée, *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle over a Forbidden Book* (New York, 2014).

**Anti-Americanism versus Peaceful Coexistence in Soviet Propaganda: A Review of Rósa Magnúsdóttir’s *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959***

Autumn Lass

*Enemy Number One* offers an in-depth look at the challenges the Soviet Union faced in waging ideological and cultural warfare against the United States. In particular, Rósa Magnúsdóttir examines the ideological messages of Soviet propaganda under Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. She argues that under Stalin, Soviet propaganda became preoccupied with anti-Americanism. However, by the time Khrushchev replaced the anti-Americanism campaign with a push to celebrate Soviet accomplishments and support peaceful coexistence, it was too late to make significant headway with the Soviet people and too difficult to overcome the paradoxical image of the United States in Soviet propaganda. Ultimately, she contends that new leadership was one of the most important influencers of change in Soviet propaganda.

Magnúsdóttir’s use of archives is impressive. Drawing upon sources such as official reports and papers, judicial records, personal records and letters, and travelogues, she gives voice to the often-overlooked bureaucrats who crafted Soviet propaganda and brings to life their fears and concerns while demonstrating their tireless efforts to control the Soviet people’s perceptions of the United States and the Soviet Union (11). However, she also acknowledges that trying to understand how successful these bureaucrats were in shaping the minds of Soviet citizens is difficult, and she attempts to do so only in limited ways throughout the monograph.

The monograph is well organized and easy to follow. It is divided into two parts. The first focuses on Stalin’s anti-Americanism campaigns and the second on Khrushchev’s attempts to promote peaceful coexistence. Within these sections, Magnúsdóttir’s chapters move chronologically through each leader’s regime and highlight the strategies and struggles they both faced with their ideological campaigns against the United States. Throughout the book, the author provides explanations for key terminology and bureaucratic organizations to assist the reader in keeping track of all the different concepts and offices referenced.

There are two major themes that run through the book.

The first is the duality of the American image within the Soviet Union. Magnúsdóttir connects this duality back to prewar portrayals of the United States in Soviet messages and argues that between the years 1890 and 1941, the United States was seen as “a model in technological and agricultural progress and as well as an example of everything gone wrong in terms of racial, social, and economic equality” (7). She also contends that these ideas “coexisted in the Soviet consciousness” throughout the Cold War (7).

This dichotomy was complicated even further by the Soviet-American alliance during the Second World War. World War II increased the influence and presence of America in the Soviet Union. For example, the Soviet people saw an increase in American technology and goods. These goods were a “symbol of another world, off limits and unattainable but nevertheless appealing” (9). The United States came to represent both progress and corruption in the Soviet Union. This two-sided America plagued Soviet information officials throughout both the Stalin and Khrushchev years.

The second major theme Magnúsdóttir explores is the balancing act Soviet ideological and cultural officials had to perform in creating their propaganda. During the Stalin years, maintaining a balance between anti-Americanism and Soviet celebration was difficult. Khrushchev’s regime found promoting peace while still being anti-Western just as hard. Both approaches were further complicated by Soviet citizens’ increased exposure to the outside world.

In part one, Magnúsdóttir focuses solely on Stalin’s anti-Americanism in Soviet propaganda. The anti-American ideology was used to label the United States as “enemy number one” and to ensure that Soviet citizens believed in the superiority of the Soviet Union (18). Magnúsdóttir argues that these campaigns were coordinated from the top down, because Stalin wanted to control not only the message but also the Soviet intelligentsia, some of whom worked in the information offices that were responsible for creating the message. This approach put incredible strain on information personnel, because they knew the anti-American messages they created would be sent out to be approved at the highest level.

While anti-Westernism was always present in Russian history, Magnúsdóttir asserts that it became more intense and extreme under Stalin. His anti-Americanism meant that Soviet patriotism “could not coexist with any form of sympathy for the West, especially not the United States” (19). To ensure that this level of anti-Americanism spread throughout the Soviet Union, Soviet propaganda and anti-American ideology became completely entrenched in everyday life. Messages of anti-Americanism could be found throughout print media, cultural activities, and the arts, including theater, film, and literature.

Magnúsdóttir also examines how Soviet anti-American campaigns featured “progressive” American writers who were critical of the United States. She argues that American racism—and the attendant status of African Americans—was the example most often used to depict the United States negatively by both American and Soviet writers. However, Magnúsdóttir claims that because of the continued presence of American technology within the country, the lingering memories of positive portrayals of American industry and agriculture, and increased impressions of American prosperity, it was not easy to promote anti-Americanism in the Soviet Union (37). Therefore, the Agitation and Propaganda Department (Agitprop) worked tirelessly to control all information about the United States so that Soviet citizens would develop the “correct” view of that country.

In chapter 2, Magnúsdóttir examines how Soviet information offices attempted to handle American propaganda efforts like the Voice of America. She argues that “campaigns against American sources of information

and the accusations of anti-Soviet behavior represent the state's unrelenting but ultimately unsuccessful efforts at preventing Soviet citizens from making independent analysis of the outside world and domestic realities" (57). While it is incredibly difficult to assess the complete impact of U.S. propaganda within the Soviet Union, the author contends that the mere belief that it was working was enough to send the Kremlin and Agitprop into overdrive.

Magnúsdóttir then explores cultural interactions between the United States and the Soviet Union during the later Stalin years. Chapter 3 is the most compelling of her chapters on Stalin's propaganda. She displays perfectly the struggles of organization, message, and implementation under Stalin's tight control of cultural and propaganda agencies. She maintains that "Soviet authorities found themselves under siege on all fronts: they were not reaching American audiences on American soil, they did not fully succeed in controlling the effects of American propaganda in the Soviet Union, and their most high-profile visit in the period, the Steinbeck-Capa trip, proved counterproductive in advancing the Soviet propaganda mission abroad" (73). Soviet officials faced an uphill battle with public diplomacy and cultural encounters, as they did with other propaganda efforts during the Stalin years, because messages of anti-Americanism were not going to work on American audiences, and the growing strength of American propaganda in the Soviet Union limited the success of Soviet messages at home (59, 73).

Throughout the chapter, Magnúsdóttir examines the roles of a variety of agencies meant to control and develop cultural interactions, such as the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (NCASF). She focuses particularly on how VOKS managed the majority of the Soviet Union's cultural diplomacy efforts during the Stalin years.

VOKS's main mission was to "facilitate and develop" interactions between the Soviet Union and foreign institutions, public organizations, and individuals/group involved in academia (60). It also sponsored visits to the Soviet Union by important foreign cultural figures. All the interactions controlled or created by VOKS were meant to showcase the best of the Soviet Union and socialism. Magnúsdóttir also explores how VOKS attempted to manage the effects of McCarthyism and anti-Soviet propaganda within the United States by sending representatives to the United States "to tell the truth about the Soviet Union" (65). Even with these attempts, she argues, Soviet cultural diplomacy in the United States was rendered powerless because of the repressive nature of McCarthyism (68–69).

Magnúsdóttir contends that the main problems with Soviet cultural propaganda—like McCarthyism and flawed messages about the Soviet Union within Soviet propaganda—were outside the control of VOKS. She concludes that Stalin's Soviet Union was not ready to welcome close inspection by foreign visitors, nor was it able to successfully counter American messages about the USSR. Ultimately, she argues, the strains of anti-Americanism and hostility toward the West doomed Soviet-American cultural relations during the Stalin years (74).

After inspecting anti-Americanism under Stalin, Magnúsdóttir explores how Khrushchev attempted to spread a message of peaceful coexistence and change

the image of the Soviet Union internationally. To do this, she claims, Khrushchev tried to become the peaceful middleman between the socialists and anti-Soviets and also worked to improve Soviet relations with former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (78). Under Khrushchev's leadership, Soviet officials worked hard to "remove themselves from the ill-informed and distrustful Stalinist view of the American enemy" (79). Slowly, Khrushchev's efforts led to an improved relationship between the two countries.

While peaceful coexistence did allow for more positive Soviet-American encounters, Soviet officials were still concerned about their citizens becoming too "infatuated" with the West. Therefore, information officers under Khrushchev had to balance their initiatives very carefully. While they were supposed to promote peaceful coexistence between the two countries, they were also expected to be critical of the United States and its system. According to Magnúsdóttir, these expectations were incredibly difficult to satisfy (99). She highlights these problems in her fifth chapter.

Chapter 3 is the most compelling of her chapters on Stalin's propaganda. She displays perfectly the struggles of organization, message, and implementation under Stalin's tight control of cultural and propaganda agencies. She maintains that "Soviet authorities found themselves under siege on all fronts: they were not reaching American audiences on American soil, they did not fully succeed in controlling the effects of American propaganda in the Soviet Union, and their most high-profile visit in the period, the Steinbeck-Capa trip, proved counterproductive in advancing the Soviet propaganda mission abroad."

The difficulty for Khrushchev's propaganda was that peaceful coexistence emphasized openness and accessibility, while the Kremlin maintained its commitment to controlling how Soviet citizens thought and how much access they had to the outside world (101). Magnúsdóttir contends that the creative departments within the cultural bureaucracy were now freer to make improvements and contributions to Soviet

information-making. However, she argues that while Khrushchev's thaw was a popular change to some within the Soviet system, others were very resistant to its messages. She shows how difficult it was for cultural and information offices to "accommodate the ideological rigor that still dominated Soviet life with the new openness and the increased exposure to the outside world that followed" (100).

Magnúsdóttir believes that these paradoxical goals can be seen in both cultural bureaucracy programs and the Soviet legal system. To illustrate the problems such goals posed during the Khrushchev years, she examines Soviet domestic life, the Voice of America and the American magazine *Amerika* under Khrushchev's Soviet Union, and the 1957 World Youth Festival. Her take on the World Youth Festival is very persuasive. She argues that the festival, which was meant to promote the Soviet system to the world, instead only increased interest in other cultures and highlighted the stark differences between the Soviet Union and other countries (119). One of the mistakes made by Soviet leaders, she concludes, "was to allow interest in America to become a threat to its politics and reforms" (120). She contends that Khrushchev's promises of reform and his admissions about the Soviet Union's inadequacies were tempered by his administration's continued efforts to control interest in the United States (120–21).

Magnúsdóttir ends her study with an examination of the possibilities of peaceful coexistence. She points to the years 1958 and 1959 as turning points for the Soviet relationship with the United States and argues that because Khrushchev's more nuanced approach to the Cold War afforded him the opportunity to improve relations with the United States, and both Soviet officials and the Soviet people favored peaceful coexistence, he could work to remove the fear of impending war while simultaneously trying to restore people's belief in the Soviet system (123).

These efforts allowed for increased introspection and revaluations of organizations, ideology, and information. Magnúsdóttir also examines the positive changes VOKS made in its cultural exchanges, such as increased Soviet-American encounters.

Magnúsdóttir argues that 1959 was the turning point for Soviet-American relations. The two countries exchanged national exhibitions, and Khrushchev visited the United States. She maintains that Khrushchev's rhetoric during these years "signaled to Soviet people that it was now acceptable to reflect on their own personal experiences with Americans . . . and to give advice to the development of Soviet-American relations" (141). She closes with a reflection on what could have been, if not for the U-2 spy plane incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis. These events destroyed the growing relationship between the two superpowers. Ultimately, while peaceful coexistence did not last, Khrushchev's messages deeply altered Soviets' perceptions of their nation and its place in the world.

Magnúsdóttir provides a fresh look into early Cold War propaganda. She examines the importance of Soviet ideology to propaganda-making and focuses our attention on the internal organization of the Soviet cultural bureaucracy. *Enemy Number One* is an excellent addition to the historiography, because it provides a close examination of the attempts of the Soviet Union to craft its ideological campaigns and shows how those campaigns faced difficulties not just because of American propaganda but also because of the Soviets' own inconsistent messages and approaches.

The author is at her best when she examines the inner workings of the Soviet propaganda machine. She highlights the information struggles within the Soviet Union and demonstrates that information campaigns under both Stalin and Khrushchev had significant internal weaknesses but also faced powerful outside pressures. When this book is paired with works on American Cold War propaganda, it is easy to see how both countries faced similar sorts of problems in message creation, message implementation, and influence control. *Enemy Number One* is an excellent study for Cold War historians, especially those who study public diplomacy and propaganda.

### Author's Response

Rósa Magnúsdóttir

This project has been with me for a long time. It started as a dissertation, but as often happens it was shelved for a while as I settled into an academic career in a new country. The final book benefited from the distance but as the historiography about the cultural Cold War continued to grow at a fast pace, I became more and more convinced that it was important to tell the Soviet side of this intriguing story. As a Russianist and a Cold War historian, I am therefore delighted that *Enemy Number One* should receive this attention in *Passport*, as it was always my hope to contribute to both Soviet and Cold War historiographies. I would like to thank Andrew Johns for organizing this roundtable and the four esteemed scholars—Kristy Ironside, Autumn Lass, Simon Miles, and Denise Youngblood—for reading and critically engaging with my book.

In writing this book, my goal was to tell the story of a state that mobilized culture as an instrument of policy. The main protagonists of this story are the political and cultural bureaucrats who contributed to this ongoing process, which changed quite dramatically in the period under investigation. Indeed, one of the main arguments of *Enemy Number One* is that these internal discussions changed over time, with the transition from Stalin to Khrushchev marked

by a shift from top-down anti-Americanism to the revival of peaceful coexistence as an official strategy. *Enemy Number One* is ultimately about the process of cultural production, not the cultural products that the Soviet state turned out.

With a focus on the United States of America and the cultural Cold War, it was difficult for me to sidestep the concept of ideology. Here, David Brandenberger's assertion that "ideology is best addressed from three perspectives relating to its production, projection, and popular reception" framed my analysis.<sup>1</sup> As my archival work unfolded, I began to see the fluidity of ideology, as Soviet "ideological workers" navigated the dialogic relationship between production, projection, and popular reception, continually reviewing all elements in order to adapt the means and methods of Soviet propaganda to the Kremlin's shifting political mood.

*Enemy Number One* looks behind the scenes of cultural diplomacy to show the inhibiting conditions and the atmosphere of fear and paranoia that "ideological workers" had to navigate while also trying to think creatively about the circular ideological process. I concur with the reviewers that we need to know more about the Soviet reception of propaganda. Indeed, as a graduate student interested in Cold War propaganda and cultural diplomacy, my most pressing question going into my project was "what did the Soviet people *really* think about the United States of America?" And I agree with Denise Youngblood that "informed conjectures" about how Soviet propaganda affected Soviet citizens are possible. For every instance of top-down propaganda that *Enemy Number One* explores, I offer evidence of how people shrugged it off, mocked it, or offered a counternarrative. These efforts notwithstanding, and as most Soviet historians would acknowledge, there are few primary sources that allow us to make direct claims about public opinion in the authoritarian framework of the Soviet Union.

When I first started reading the rehabilitation review files in the Russian State Archives, I thought I had found the kind of evidence that could demonstrate that Soviet citizens did not accept the state's anti-American narrative. The files revealed the stories of those accused of praising the United States, consuming American culture, or interacting with Americans. Soon I understood, however, that the nature of these sources was complicated, and that they shared some of the political and epistemological problems of the *svodki* (reports on the "moods of the population"), which I also read with great interest for how they demonstrated the Soviet state's near obsession with the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of getting stuck in binary paradigms about the Soviet subject versus the state, however, I focused on what these rich sources could actually demonstrate. They evidence the Soviet state's anxiety about what it deemed to be inappropriate views of the United States. The same can be said for all the state's efforts to control and contain American propaganda, such as the journal *Amerika* and the radio broadcasts of the Voice of America; they point to relentless fears and efforts to control popular opinion in the Soviet Union.

At the book's core is an attentiveness to change over time. Youngblood is right about her Soviet friends being uninterested in American propaganda in the late 1970s, but that was twenty years after the period under consideration in *Enemy Number One*. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Soviet authorities rightly thought that some Soviet citizens were interested in American propaganda. And like Youngblood's friends in the 1970s who recognized that it was all propaganda, I argue a similar, if more nuanced point, based on a reading of the archival records. Access to alternative sources of information in that earlier era allowed many Soviet people to question and critically engage with both Soviet propaganda and the outside world in ways that otherwise were inconceivable.

It is a delicate balancing act to analyze both the structure of Soviet propaganda and the reception of these efforts, as Autumn Lass and Simon Miles both acknowledge. Indeed, Miles rightly grasps the concern that grips the top-level bureaucracy and is unmistakable in the archival record. The Soviet authorities feared that access to alternative sources of information would create doubts about the system. The varied reactions I cite also show that Soviet citizens could and did hold both pro-Soviet and pro-American views simultaneously or sequentially, making it impossible to characterize Soviet audiences as monolithic in their reaction to state propaganda. It has generally served me well as a historian to acknowledge that our human subjects are multidimensional and, as Jan Plamper states, “can think many different things at the same time, say many different things that contradict one another over short periods of time, and act in many different ways that contradict one another.”<sup>3</sup> *Enemy Number One* demonstrates that Soviet audiences are no exception.

The importance of the wartime alliance, the suppression of the memory of it under Stalin, and the public and somewhat open acknowledgement of it in 1959 make up one of the threads that run through this story of complex and sometimes contradictory attitudes about the United States in the Soviet Union. That backdrop gives context to an event like the Moscow Youth Festival, which marked the first opportunity since the Second World War for thousands of Soviet people to interact with foreigners and be exposed to external cultures and attitudes.

That event fit into the broader narrative of peaceful coexistence, and I used it to underscore Khrushchev’s willingness to take chances for this narrative to be taken seriously around the world. When I recount how many Soviet citizens embraced peaceful coexistence in their letters to the authorities, I did not mean to imply, as Ironside suggests, that they became “dangerously interested” in America; rather, I sought to highlight their relief that after all this time, they had a safe framework for discussing their wartime ally, while obediently applying the discourse of peaceful coexistence.

The latter half of 1959 saw the culmination of these tropes about the American ally-turned-enemy. The letters written to Khrushchev about the American National Exhibit and his visit to the United States show how people embraced and evoked the idea of peaceful coexistence, while also drawing on previous myths and their own recent experiences with the United States. In an otherwise thoughtful review, Ironside (no doubt inadvertently) misrepresents my argument when she suggests that I dismiss the ambivalent reaction of Soviet audiences to the American National Exhibit. In the book I write that “some people, like Ivan Aleksandrovich and his neighbor, countered the American propaganda with examples from

their own good, Soviet life,” before going on to say that “the American National Exhibit confirmed to both the Soviet leadership and people that the United States provided comforts and goods that the Soviet people could only dream of” (136–37). My intention here was to summarize a variety of attitudes (both positive and negative) about the summer of 1959 as they unfolded in the context of Khrushchev’s openness about the wartime alliance.

It was no easy task to try to make an original contribution to a crowded field, to make historiographical choices about what went into the book, and to distill the story so that it had focus, but also sufficient context. As I noted in the beginning, I had hoped that this book would reach beyond the Soviet field in which I was trained to find an audience of Cold War historians as well. I was therefore pleased to see Lass say that *Enemy Number One* pairs well with works on American Cold War propaganda.

Historians of American foreign relations will of course be familiar with works such as Laura Belmonte’s *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, which covers the same time period as *Enemy Number One* and tells the inside story of how the U.S. government promoted “the American way of life” in the United States.<sup>4</sup> *Enemy Number One* offers a counternarrative, arguing that in order to preserve and promote a Soviet “way of life,” images of America had to be controlled and contained. It also offers anyone who is interested in Soviet cultural diplomacy or cultural relations with foreign countries a view of the inside workings of the Soviet cultural bureaucracy, the insecurities of cultural bureaucrats, and, ultimately, their lack of achievements.

I want to finish by again thanking my reviewers for allowing me to reflect upon some of the main themes of my book. *Enemy Number One* is not a story of successful propaganda, as Miles and Lass acknowledge; it is a story of how, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Soviet authorities took a former ally, turned it into its primary adversary, and waged an ideological Cold War, both at home and abroad. Because of the recent wartime alliance, this was not an easy task. The Soviet people were not easily convinced, and the cultural bureaucracy found it difficult to navigate the cultural output and control the message at the same time.

#### Notes:

1. David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror Under Stalin, 1927–1941* (New Haven, CT, 2012), 2.
2. Jan Plamper, “Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion Stalinism,” in *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism*, ed. Paul Corner (Oxford, UK, 2009), 67.
3. *Ibid.*, 73.
4. Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013).